



Newark Community Project for People With A.I.D.S.

'Let us fight the virus, not each other.'

P. O. BOX 1241
NEWARK, NEW JERSEY 07101

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Editor
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Even sudden epidemics of a deadly disease without a known cure should not be used to promote widespread panic throughout the general population, as Mr. Bernard Goldberg notes in his Op-Ed piece ('No Place for Sentimental Journalism on AIDS') of February 2nd.

But it is at least equally nonproductive to fault those who report on the continuing spread of the HIV virus and the ongoing discoveries of new dangers (e.g., the 'window of opportunity' of two to two and one half years between actual contraction of the virus and its ability to be detected by current testing as well as the ever lengthening possible 'incubation period' between contracting the virus and manifesting symptoms of the disease itself).

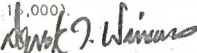
No doubt the report of veteran sex researchers Masters & Johnson in 1989 that the virus had already been spread among 3 million Americans, a substantial proportion of whom were heterosexual, non IV drug users, now appears hypothetical at best. But the known facts bespeak the possibility of the virus spreading among the general population due to multiple sex partners, not to mention the experience in sub-Saharan Africa. Thus, there may be validity to the assertion by Masters & Johnson, and their researcher Kolodny that: "If there are lingering uncertainties about the transmission of a deadly infection, shouldn't we be adopting precautions against the worst-case possibility rather than making the most optimistic assumptions?"

Mr. Goldberg seems to confuse two distinctly separate aspects of the AIDS epidemic: (1) Reports on scientific research, and statistical analysis on the one hand, and (2) Reports on individual cases and the debilitating effects of the disease as it impacts individuals, families, and in some cases whole communities. The first deals with probabilities which may indeed be debatable and the reports subject to legitimate criticism. [Clearly, most senior citizens are not at high risk of contracting the virus.]

The second form of reporting -- equally important to the public's understanding of the epidemic's real impact -- deals with the human faces of real live AIDS patients. It is difficult to confront the terrifying reality without a sense of compassion, perhaps even some sentiment. It is this reality that Mr. Goldberg chooses to ignore.

As for Mr. Goldberg's supercilious assertions regarding the plight of the homeless ("sometimes they are innocent victims and sometimes they are not"), all the evidence points to a contrary judgment as to the wave of homeless that overwhelmed the nation in the 1980's. Most of these are not your stereotyped 'Bowery Bums'.

Unfortunately, we who are residents of Newark are experiencing a tragic overlap between the HIV infected and our substantial homeless population (reliably estimated between 12,000 and 15,000).



DEREK T. WINANS

Chairman, Newark Community Project
for People With A.I.D.S.